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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 001204

SIPDIS

NEA/ARP, NEA/RA, S/CT, AND INL/PC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/22/2019
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [PGOV](#) [KU](#)
SUBJECT: SATELLITE TV ATTACK ON KUWAIT, S TRIBALS PROMPTS
BACKLASH

REF: A. KUWAIT 1195
[B](#). KUWAIT 1181
[C](#). KUWAIT 1154
[D](#). KUWAIT 244

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor Tom Rosenberger for reasons 1
.4 b and d

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) In an apparent attempt to exploit the GoK's recent spate of widely-perceived victories over parliamentary Islamists and tribalists (refs A, B), former parliamentary candidate and liberal urbanite Mohammed Al-Juwaihel launched on December 18 a scathing media attack against Kuwaitis of tribal origin via his new Al-Sour satellite channel. His denigration of tribal figures -- many by name -- on Al-Sour (Arabic - "the wall" -- aptly named to reflect what many of the urbanite "hadhar" (Arabic - "settled") Kuwaitis view as the class divide in Kuwaiti society between merchant and bedouin), agitated Islamists and tribalists and prompted rallies of support for those tribalist MPs who only recently had failed in their efforts to secure a vote of non-cooperation against the PM. On the receiving end of death threats from enraged tribals, and now a warrant for his arrest from the government, Al-Juwaihel has fled the country, reportedly to the UAE. End summary.

Tripping Over the Class Divide

[1](#)2. (C) Seeking to speak on behalf of the Kuwaiti hadhar, Al-Juwaihel's December 18 diatribehurled unprecedented invective against tribes (the powerful Al-Mutairi) and tribalist MPs, notably Minister of Interior griller Musallam Al-Barrak (ref C). These insults castigated tribalists and their followers as "dogs, unpatriotic, inconsequential, and sexually ambiguous." The predictable response was that thousands of Kuwaitis, including a number of prominent hadhar MPs, rallied to show their support for the injured parties (note: a large rally planned for the 21st evening was postponed out of consideration for a highly anticipated local soccer match between Barcelona and a Kuwaiti club). Tribal MPs took the opportunity to renew calls to grill the PM, and Ministers of Interior and Communications over Al-Juwaihel's alleged abuse of Kuwait's press laws.

Conspiracies Abound

[1](#)3. (C) Political scientist and liberal columnist Dr. Ali Al-Zo'bi told poloff on December 22 that the Al-Juwaihel affair would backfire against those trying to exploit Kuwait's societal divide. Al-Juwaihel, he said, is a known abuser of alcohol and drugs, and was "not capable mentally, socially, financially, or politically" of independently

confronting the tribalists. Al-Zo'bi, like many other Kuwaitis, consequently concludes Al-Juwaihel was put up to the job by others -- and the conspiracy of choice points to elements within the ruling Al Sabah family seeking to create a crisis to diminish the PM (the latter riding high after his successful handling of a closed parliamentary grilling December 8). Unfortunately, while Al-Zo'bi believes the attack on tribalists was intended to be more subtle in order to accentuate societal differences, Al-Juwaihel botched the job and used over-the-top language that far from dividing society left even liberals to side with the aggrieved tribalists. In the heat of the moment, some tribalists suggested a possible need for a "tribal intifada" and at least one independent MP urged concerned citizens to march on the Ministry of Interior to protest Al-Juwaihel's efforts to "disrupt Kuwaiti unity." However, as it has become clearer that no one was prepared to defend Al-Juwaihel, tempers have cooled, soothed also in part by Kuwait's Council of Ministers calling for stiffer penalties for those who tamper with national unity.

Restoring Order

14. (C) While the rhetoric emanating from the GoK has somewhat mollified agitated tribalists, the government took a big step forward December 22 by issuing a warrant for Al-Juwaihel's arrest (in absentia -- he fled the country the previous day, reportedly to the UAE) -- a move that signals the GoK is prepared to take decisive action in this case commensurate with actions previously taken against outspoken Islamists and tribalists. This balanced approach

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will likely further ease tensions, although tribalist MPs now have a new and fresh issue for which to attack the government -- and to demand further restrictions and penalties for exercise of free speech, something that will help advance their broader political agenda. Having reportedly had his satellite channel dropped by Nilesat (perhaps as a result of strong GoK pressure), Al-Juwaihel has allegedly moved Al-Sour to Hotbird, a satellite largely inaccessible in Kuwait. End note.)

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